



END HUNGER CONNECTICUT! Inc.

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Testimony in support of RB 574: An Act Concerning State Enhancement to the Federal Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

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Good Day, Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization, with over 1,000 members, many who are emergency food providers. I am here today to speak in favor of R.B. 574: An Act Concerning State Enhancement to the Federal Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

The WIC program is a preventative nutrition program that provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to health care to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and infants and children at nutritional risk. To be eligible for participation in the WIC program an individual must be (1) low-income with a household income below 185% of the federal poverty level; (2) nutritionally at risk, as evaluated by a health professional and (3) a pregnant or postpartum woman, or an infant, or a child under five.

Participants are provided with a monthly food package tailored to enhance their health and nutritional needs which includes vitamins and mineral content usually missing in a low-income diet. Children who receive WIC food packages have lower incidences of iron-deficiency anemia. This is vitally important as anemia affects a child's ability to learn, as well as decreases motor development and creates an increase to susceptibility to lead poisoning.

It is also one of the most effective nutrition programs in the federal arsenal to defeat food insecurity and related outcomes. It is estimated that every dollar spent on WIC results in a savings of between \$1.77 and \$3.13 in Medicaid cost to newborns and their mothers. That cost estimate does not include the future savings in successfully preventing overweight and ensuing diseases in young children – creating healthy habits in early life. Additionally, a University of California and RAND study showed that WIC participation improved birth outcomes by reducing low birth weight by 29% and very low birth weight by half. This is significant as low and very low birth weight babies are at significant risk for lower earnings, education status and employment rates as adults.

The WIC program is federally funded, but not as an entitlement. It is constantly under significant monetary pressure. Federal funding is directly tied to participation levels. If Connecticut's program does not grow we can expect level funding for the program. This is difficult on many levels, but

especially for the local WIC offices that feel the strain of increased healthcare costs and wages for workers, among other costs that continue to rise every year.

Connecticut currently puts little state funding into the program. The \$500,000 in funding proposed in this bill should be directly tied to increasing participation and providing frontline WIC staff with the resources they need to do their job. Many states understand the importance of WIC and put additional funding into the program. Massachusetts contributed \$12.4 million solely to front line operations during each of the last two fiscal years, and New York contributed approximately \$20 million per year during the same period.

Additionally, one very good way to increase participation in the program is to ensure that those families that are receiving federal programs are educated about the WIC Program. Those who participate in the Food Stamp Program, Temporary Family Assistance, HUSKY Plan, Part A and Energy Assistance are all below the income limit for the family of 185% required for enrollment in WIC. It makes great sense to require DSS to make that connection to those that are enrolled in those programs, and we wholeheartedly agree with that. It should be noted that DSS is open to that idea.

Finally, as we are able to increase participation in the WIC program, the state of Connecticut will need to put in some "bridge" money. The federal funding comes to the state from the prior year's enrollment in the program - creating a lag in the amount of federal funding that we receive when enrollment increases. Given the extraordinary pluses participation has to our mothers and their children it only makes sense to do what we can to increase participation and to increase the state's share in the paying for the WIC program.

This is a good first step, and End Hunger Connecticut! supports the intent of the legislation.

Thank you very much.